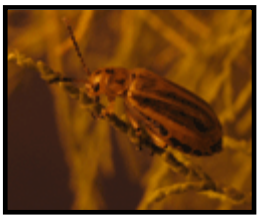
COLORADO
DEPARTMENT OF
AGRICULTURE

Inside Ag

March 2009

Bug of the Month
Visitors from Tunisia



One of the big challenges in biocontrol is finding biocontrol agents overseas that will survive in the diverse climates and ecological settings that we have in the US.

The tamarisk leaf beetles that are so successful in Western Colorado were collected in the mountains of Central Asia. They do well in mountainous areas with harsh winters. On the plains of Eastern Colorado and other western states they haven't done as well, so our overseas collaborators have searched the plains of Asia and around the Mediterranean Sea, places that are flatter or with milder climates and more southern latitudes, for southern or plains-adapted beetles.

The Palisade Insectary is home to many of these new strains of tamarisk-feeding beetles. The latest arrivals were collected last summer in Tunisia, not far from the Mediterranean Sea. They look almost exactly like their Central Asian cousins but they thrive in warmer and more southern climates.

Work is now underway in Texas to test these beetles in the field. Our collaborators depend on the Palisade Insectary to keep these strains of beetles alive and well. In exchange we depend on our collaborators for information that will point the way for us to pick either the Tunisia beetles, or another of our strains of *Diorhabda* beetles, to feed on the major tamarisk infestations along the Arkansas River and tributaries. An added benefit of the collaboration is that scientists in Texas go out and easily find green tamarisk, even in the middle of winter. During the winter they package it up and send it to Palisade where we feed it to our hungry visitors from overseas.